

# **Holistic Representation in NYC Family Court Reunifies Families & Saves \$40 Million in Taxpayer Money, New Study Finds**

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NEW YORK - A study conducted by NYU School of Law examined over 28,000 child welfare cases in New York City and found that holistic, multi-disciplinary representation is more effective than traditional legal representation at reunifying families and shortening the length of stay in foster care. The study also found that children whose parents were represented by holistic practices were at no greater risk for abuse or neglect, while remaining with their families at higher rates than those whose parents were represented by traditional practitioners.

The first-of-its-kind [study](#) looked at child welfare cases in New York City between 2007 and 2014, examining parents assigned solo practitioners on the Assigned Counsel Panel alongside lawyers who worked for one of three interdisciplinary family defense offices that have interdisciplinary teams of lawyers, social workers and parent advocates: the Bronx Defenders (BxD), Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS), and the Center for Family Representation (CFR). It found that interdisciplinary family defense offices were able to secure the safe return of children to their families approximately 43% more often in their first year than solo practitioners, and 25% more often in the 2nd year.

The study also found that full implementation of a multi-disciplinary representation model would produce \$40 million in annual savings for the foster care system.

“Families belong together, and this study shows us that fully embracing a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach to child welfare cases will help empower parents and shorten traumatizing family separations,” said Emma Ketteringham, Managing Director of the Family Defense Practice at the Bronx Defenders. “Our model of representation leads to better outcomes for families and produces cost savings that can be directly re-invested into the low-income communities that are most often the targets in child removal cases.”

"The foster care system is not a substitute for loving families," said Lauren Shapiro, Director of Brooklyn Defender Services' Family Defense Practice. "Interdisciplinary parent representation keeps families together and children out of foster care. There is a significant benefit when attorneys work collaboratively, have supervision and extensive training, and access to supports they need to provide zealous legal representation to their clients. This study shows that highly-qualified and properly resourced attorneys combined with social work services and support results in more families staying safely together. We are honored to be a part of this important effort."

“This is an important and timely study that confirms what our data has told us for years - the interdisciplinary model of parent representation works - we can keep vulnerable families together, safely, when we offer them support,” said Michele Cortese, Executive Director of the Center for Family Representation. “We look forward to future studies that expand the scope of this research, to include the important impact of our model for families from the start of their case, the countless occasions when we prevent children from being removed and placed in foster care on the first day a case is filed in court.”

"Family separations are traumatic, and the study underlines the fact that they're unnecessary and costly, too," said Michelle Burrell, Managing Attorney of Neighborhood Defender Service's Family Defense Practice. "Holistic representation not only saves money, but it keeps children with their families, where they are safest, and it keeps our communities intact."

The report can be found here:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019074091930088X>

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